MARJORIE LIU

SANA TAKEDA

MONSTRESS™

image

28

OUR COMEBACK WILL BE BIGGER THAN OUR SETBACK!
#backthecomeback™

2019 HUGO AWARD WINNER

THE STORY SO FAR...

In the walled Arcanic city of Ravenna, Maika Halfwolf and her companions, Kippa and Corvin, prepared to face off against an incursion by the army of the Federation of Man. Civilian Arcanics began training to take up arms while Maika teamed up with an enigmatic band of warriors known as the Grey Riders to terrify the invading humans with small, strategic strikes. But during one mission with the Grey Riders, Maika was drained of all energy while using the powers of Zinn, the Monstrum that lives inside her. When she awoke, the battle had already reached Ravenna.

In Maika's absence, Corvin led the training of the makeshift army while his sister, Bettani, tended to the wounded in Ravenna's hospital. Kippa, meanwhile, was tasked with protecting refugee children in the Temple of Ubasti. But when Kippa tried to help pacifist refugees enter the city through a secret passage into the temple, the plan backfired horrifically. Outside, a group of young Cumaean women with strange powers seized the moment, attacking Kippa and the refugees and taking advantage of the passageway to breach the city's walls.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

SIR CORVIN D'ORO An Arcanic Lord, First Watchman of the Court and Commander of the Inner Wall. He is loyal to the Dusk Court but has willingly defied their orders because of his desire to protect Maika and his belief that she can and will serve a greater purpose.

WARLORD The Dawn Court's "Sword of the East," twin sister of Moriko Halfwolf, and Maika's aunt. Ruthless in her ambition, the Warlord's greatest desire is to unravel the mystery behind the destruction of Constantine. She believes the secrets of Constantine will protect the Arcanics in their impending war against the humans — but she does not realize that the answers she seeks lie within her young niece.

NEEDLE & HAMMER: The Inquistrixes, Cumaean special agents known for their ferocity and weaponry. They are devoted to the Cumaean cause and are increasingly disturbed by corruption in their order -- but they do not realize how deep, and how monstrous, that corruption truly is.

CONSTANTINE.
SIX YEARS AGO.

MAIKA!

AIEE!!

ARRR!!

YERGH!!

STUPID!

YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED DOWN!

SHUT... UP...

SOMETHING... SOMETHING... HAPPENING...

IT'S JUST A STORM! DON'T RUN!

IDIOT, DOES THAT LOOK NATURAL?

GODDESS, THE SKY...

PLEASE, PLEASE, DON'T LET THAT BE A NEW WEAPON.

NO, *LOOK.* THE HUMANS ARE FLEEING, TOO.

CORPORAL, FETCH A RUNNER. WE NEED TO SEND A MESSAGE TO THE WARLORD.

HOLY MARIUM, SAVE US FROM EVIL...

...THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING...

...I WAS SURE THE SEERS WERE WRONG...

I FEEL STRANGE...MY INSIDES ARE PULLING... APART...

HELP ME.

=GASP=

TUYA... HELP ME...

HELP.

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RAVENNA.
PRESENT DAY.

WITCH, YOU CANNOT HURT ME.

MY SHIELD IS MORE POWERFUL THAN YOU COULD EVER DREAM TO BE.

RETREAT TO THE GATE! GO! GO!

KRSH

GAH! MARIUM, POISON THIS DEMON!

HE WILL NOT BURN, HE CANNOT BE CUT, AND I CANNOT BREAK HIM!

HE IS PROTECTED BY UNHOLY POWERS!

I CAN ONLY HOLD HIM DOWN!

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LEAVE HIM, SISTER ODILE.

NO, SISTER AURELIA! TAKE HIS MIND!

I HAVE BEEN TRYING. NOTHING WORKS.

BESIDES, THE SMOKE IS TOO THICK, THE AIR TOO HOT. WE WILL EXPIRE.

SISTER MEKTILDA, YOU MUST STOP!

YOUR FLAMES MOVE TOO SWIFTLY! YOU ARE TRAPPING US WITH YOUR HOLY INFERNO!

WHAM!

INQUISITRIX, THESE ARE VALUABLE INSTRUMENTS.

PLEASE TRY TO BE MORE GENTLE WITH --

GENTLENESS IS NOT WHAT THEY NEED.

GO ON, LITTLE FOOLS. RUN.

LET US SEE IF YOU CAN SURVIVE YOUR OWN POWER.

I CERTAINLY HAVE NO INTENTION OF BEING KILLED BY YOUR LACK OF DISCIPLINE.

GODDESS, WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?

DON'T LOOK TOO HARD. WE NEED TO TAKE WHAT WE CAN AND START RUNNING.

...MISTER MONSTER...

WAIT, THIS CHILD IS ALIVE. MAYBE WE SHOULD --

CHNK

THERE, NOW SHE'S DEAD AGAIN.

COME ON, I CAN HEAR THE FEDERATION PIPES.

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NNGH

AAIIEEE!

GODDESS!

HUFF

HUFF

NNGH

HUFF

GODDESS... GODDESS...OH, GODDESS...

SOB SOB SOB

YOU'RE *H-HAPPY* ABOUT THIS.

YOU TH-THINK I D-DESERVE IT.

I L-LEFT YOU ALONE... I M-MADE A M-MISTAKE THAT GOT YOU K-KILLED.

=GASP=

H-HELLO?

THEY... THEY...CAN'T ALL BE...

...GODDESS... PLEASE... PLEASE...I'LL DO ANYTHING...

BREATHING, SOMEONE'S BREATHING... I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU...

HELLO? DON'T BE AFRAID... IT'S JUST...

...ME.

GODDESS PROTECT US WATCH OVER US GODDESS SURROUND US IN YOUR UMBRA AND GIVE ME THE STRENGTH TO HELP THESE PEOPLE WHO I HURT I HURT THEM I BROKE MY WORD AND NOW I HAVE TO FIX THIS PLEASE HELP ME PLEASE HELP ME GODDESS PLEASE PLEASE...

LOOK AT ALL THOSE PEOPLE... WE'LL NEVER GET INTO THE HOSPITAL.

NOT THROUGH THERE, WE WON'T.

...BUT CATS HAVE THEIR OWN ENTRANCE.

YOUR TAIL... THAT IS A TERRIBLE BURN.

IT'S N-NOTHING... PLEASE, *PLEASE,* HELP THESE OTHERS.

OH, NO... THESE INJURIES...

CAN YOU SAVE THEM?

THEY'RE ALREADY DEAD.

NOT EVEN UBASTI COULD HAVE SAVED THEM FROM THESE WOUNDS.

BUT THEY WERE ALIVE WHEN WE LEFT THE TEMPLE...THEY WERE BREATHING...

I SWEAR IT...

YOU. YOU'RE CORVIN'S WARD.

HAVE YOU SEEN --

NO, NEVERMIND.

DISLOCATED ARM, BURNED TAIL.

YOU GOT A VISIT FROM THE WITCHES, JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.

N-NO! DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME ON ME! OTHERS ARE MORE WOUNDED!

THIS WILL ONLY TAKE A MOMENT.

AIIEEE!!

SNAP!

I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT YOUR TAIL. THERE ARE OTHERS WITH WORSE BURNS, AND I NEED TO KEEP MY SALVES FOR THEM.

IT'S OKAY. I...I'M... OKAY.

BRAVE LITTLE FOX.

HEALER BETTANI! WE NEED YOU!

AHHHH!

THE WITCHES ARE HEADED TO THE GATE. WE CAN'T HOLD THEM BACK.

WE'RE LOSING TOO MANY TO THEM, AND THE FIRES ARE SPREADING.

THE DEAD WILL BE THE LUCKY ONES.

YOU HAVE TO KILL ME IF THE FEDERATION BREAKS THROUGH. DON'T WAIT.

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I GOT YOU, WITCH... I GOT YOU...

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BURN ME OUT BEFORE I --

KILLED THE SNIPER! REACHED HER, MARIUM PRAISE BE!

HEAD HURTS TOO MUCH FOR FIRE.

UNFAIR. NOT RIGHT. I SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN PUNISHED. I WAS IN CONTROL.

YOU WERE UNDER MARIUM'S RAPTURE, SISTER MEKTILDA, WHICH WOULD EXCITE ANYONE. BUT EAT YOUR PAIN...YOUR FIRE WILL RETURN.

CANDY

AREN'T THEY *REMARKABLE?* WE BEGAN THIS EXPERIMENT BEFORE THE LAST WAR.

OUR MOST POWERFUL CUMAEA AGREED TO BECOME PREGNANT, AND WE INJECTED LILIUM INTO THEIR WOMBS FOR ALL THREE TRIMESTERS.

THESE ARE THE CHILDREN WHO *SURVIVED.* I CAN'T WAIT TO REPORT THEIR ENHANCED STRENGTH TO THE OTHERS --

-- MMPH.

THE INQUISITRIXES WERE NOT TOLD ABOUT THESE ABOMINATIONS.

WE WOULD HAVE HALTED THE EXPERIMENTS AND PURGED THE WOMBS.

WITH ALL THAT LILIUM IN THEIR VEINS, THEY'RE MORE DEMON THAN HUMAN.

MORE HUMAN THAN YOU, OLD TIMER. MORE POWERFUL, MORE BLESSED.

WE'RE YOUR REPLACEMENTS. CREATED TO KILL, FOR THE GLORY OF MARIUM.

INQUISITRIXES UPHOLD CUMAEAN LAW, AND MAINTAIN THE PURITY OF THE ORDER. WE HAVE DONE SO FOR A THOUSAND YEARS.

YOU CAN BARELY HOLD UP YOUR OWN SPINE.

YOU HAD ONLY ONE MISSION -- TO OPEN THE CITY GATE FOR THE ARMY. BUT YOU'RE NOT EVEN CLOSE, AND YOU'VE *ALREADY* WASTED YOUR STRENGTH.

WE'RE HIDING HERE SO YOU CAN *REST.*

STRONG ENOUGH TO KILL *YOU.*

WHAT'S *SHE* SAYING? CAN'T READ MUTE-SPEAK.

THE HAMMER IS SAYING YOU HAVE MORE TEETH THAN *BRAIN...*

LOOK ME IN THE EYES AND SAY THAT --

MARIUM! YOU'RE UGLIER THAN I THOUGHT!

WHAT HOLDS YOU TOGETHER? LUCK AND STAPLES?

HOW DO YOU EVEN *EAT?*

SHHLLK

=GASP=

OH, MY.

WHAT... WHAT'S HAPPENED?

I FEEL STRAAAANGE

HOW SAD. I WAS HOPING YOU'D FEEL ONLY AGONY.

YOU'LL BE BROUGHT UP ON CHARGES FOR THIS! WE'VE SPENT YEARS PERFECTING THESE SISTER-SOLDIERS!

I SHUDDER IF THAT'S YOUR IDEA OF *PERFECTION.* YOU SHOULD HAVE TAUGHT THEM *MANNERS* INSTEAD.

SNAP!

RESPECT YOUR ELDERS, CHILDREN...

...OR YOUR ELDERS WILL KILL YOU DEAD.

NOW GO AND FIGHT. OPEN THAT GATE FOR THE ARMY.

BUT OUR SURVIVAL IS IMPERILED WITH THE LOSS OF OUR SISTER. THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE IS IN SHADOW, AND THE LONG ARM OF THE DEMON GLISTENS.

THAT DOES SOUND DIRE, DOESN'T IT?

GO!

THERE IS A ROT IN THE CUMAEA.

A DECAY IN THE ORDERS OF DIVINE GRACE.

YOU'RE RIGHT, HAMMER. THE TIME FOR OBEYING ORDERS IS OVER. WE MUST RETURN TO AURUM.

"WE HAVE BEEN INFECTED WITH DEMONS, AND GREED FOR DEMONIC POWER.

"WE MUST ROOT IT OUT."

YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.

NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS NEXT, STAY CALM, FOLLOW THE PLAN.

YES, LORD CORVIN.

BUT...RESPECTFULLY... WHAT ABOUT THOSE WITCHES? THEY CAN KILL US WITH THEIR MINDS. WE CAN'T FIGHT THAT.

THE WITCHES ARE *MY* PROBLEM. FOCUS ON THE GATE, AND THE ARMY OUTSIDE.

THE WITCHES ARE *NOT* YOUR PROBLEM, CORVIN. THE *HALFWOLF* IS.

SHE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE UNDER OUR CONTROL BY NOW.

ARE YOU HERE TO FIGHT OR COMPLAIN, TANNO?

THE BARONESS SYMPATHIZES WITH YOUR RELUCTANCE TO ELIMINATE THE GIRL'S MIND, BUT --

ARE YOU BLIND, OLD CAT? THERE'S A FEDERATION ARMY OUTSIDE THESE WALLS.

THIS SEIGE IS NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT'S COMING... *YOU KNOW THAT.*

BUT YOU BROUGHT THE HALFWOLF INTO A *WAR ZONE* TO FIGHT *HUMANS?*

WE NEED HER *BODY,* CORVIN. HER *LIVING* BODY. IF WE LOSE ACCESS TO HER POWER BECAUSE OF --

ENOUGH.

TELL THE BARONESS WHATEVER YOU WANT...THAT I'VE BETRAYED HER, THAT I'VE LOST MY MIND...THAT THE SEERS WERE WRONG ABOUT ME...

...BUT WE HAVE A CITY TO SAVE, AND THAT DOES MATTER --

=GASP=

THOSE WERE GIVEN TO...TO...

WHAT... WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO KIPPA?

NOTHING. THE WITCHES KILLED HER.

IT'S FOR THE BEST. SHE WAS A DANGEROUS UNKNOWN. THE SEERS COULDN'T SCRY WHY THE HALFWOLF KEPT HER NEAR.

WHEN THEY LOOKED FOR THE CHILD, IT WAS AS IF THERE WAS A HOLE IN THEIR SIGHT -- AN ABSENCE OF LIGHT.

YOU CAN'T BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THEIR CONCERN --

LORD CORVIN! SOMETHING IS COMING!

NO... IT CAN'T BE...

I KNOW THAT INSIGNIA.

CORVIN, YOU FOOL! FIND THE HALFWOLF! LISTEN TO ME!

FIND HER NOW!

I REALLY LIKED THAT HORSE.

AND YOU... YOU'RE ACTING LIKE THIS IS A PICNIC.

THE GODDESS DECIDES HOW LONG WE LIVE, SISTER.

MAYBE I HAVE ANOTHER MINUTE, MAYBE A HUNDRED YEARS, BUT I'M GOING TO ENJOY THIS CARROT AND BEING ALIVE WITH ALL MY DEVOTION.

AIEEE!

EEEEE!!

MARIUM, CONDEMN THESE DEMONS.

NNFF!

STRIP THEM OF LIFE.

GRAHH!

GODDESS.

WE ARE YOUR BLADES.

MARIUM WILL BURN YOUR SOULS FROM THIS WORLD.

DO NOT LOOK AWAY FROM YOUR FATES.

WHY AREN'T YOU OUT THERE ATTACKING THEM?

THE MOMENT WE SHOW OUR FACES, THOSE WITCHES WILL KILL US. WE'RE NO MATCH FOR THAT.

THE HEROES WERE THE FIRST TO DIE TODAY. I'M DONE FIGHTING.

THE FEDERATION HASN'T EVEN BROKEN THROUGH THE WALL, AND YOU'RE ALREADY GIVING UP?

I HOPE YOU CHOKE ON THAT CARROT!

OH, GODDESS.

CHILDREN ARE SO STUPID.

GODDESS, GODDESS, LET ME STOP THEM, GIVE ME STRENGTH, LET ME FIX WHAT I DID, PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE...

YAH!

...THAT MIND...

...THE CHILD FROM OUTSIDE THE WALL...

SLSHH

THERE WAS SOMETHING STRANGE ABOUT YOU BEFORE.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! SISTER AURELIA! HURRY! WE'RE ALMOST TO THE GATE!

SOMETHING IN YOUR HEAD. A THROB THAT LEADS BEYOND YOU...

IT IS SO LOUD NOW. WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS BEHIND YOUR EYES...

...WHAT WILL I SEE IF I FOLLOW THAT SOUND...

YOU'LL SEE WHO YOU REALLY ARE!

SHRIVELED! EMPTY! YOUR SOUL IS SCREAMING FROM THE COLD INSIDE YOU!

AND I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!

MY SOUL IS COLD WITH PURPOSE, DEMON...THAT IS WHAT I SEE IN YOUR EYES...

BUT NO... THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE INSIDE YOU... SOMETHING YOU'RE TIED TO... SHOW ME... SHOW --

RAHHH!!

MARIUM! OH, MARIUM!

THE HUNGER!

THE HUNGER!

WE ARE DEVOURED!

MARIUM HAS BETRAYED US!

WHAT HAS THAT CHILD DEMON DONE TO OUR --

-- SISTER --

=GASP=

BETRAY --
=GURK=

SHHLNKKNK

I'VE MISSED THE SMELL OF WITCH BLOOD.

RRAAHHH!

=GASP=

AAAGH! YOU ARE NOT -- NNGH -- STRONGER THAN ME!

SISTER! IGNORE THE FLYING DEMON! KILL THE OTHER ONE! HURRY!

NO! LET THEM GO!

GYAH!

KIPPA!

LET THEM GO LET THEM GO --

=GASP=

WHAM

SISTER... DON'T RUN... CAN STILL FIGHT...

NO WITCH ESCAPES ME --

...BACK...

WSSHHH

DAMN IT!

I'LL FLY AHEAD AND BLOCK THEIR WAY.

STAY WHERE YOU ARE, CROW!

LET THOSE WITCHES RUN. THEY'RE WEAKENED, AND A DISTRACTION.

WE HAVE AN ENTIRE HUMAN ARMY TO SUBDUE.

AS YOU COMMAND, WARLORD.

YOU HAVE THE MARKINGS OF A HIGH LORD. IS THERE ANY CHANCE YOUR WORTHLESS DUSK COURT WILL SEND REINFORCEMENTS?

I DON'T KNOW. I'M NOT HERE AS THEIR REPRESENTATIVE. I CAME FOR PERSONAL REASONS.

AT LEAST YOU DID THAT MUCH.

MY AIRSHIPS ARE STILL HALF A DAY BEHIND ME. WE MUST HOLD RAVENNA UNTIL THEY ARRIVE.

WHAT ABOUT MISS?

SHHH, KIPPA.

DON'T TALK ABOUT HER. DON'T TRUST ANYONE. ESPECIALLY NOW.

I WAS TOLD THE WITCHES HAD KILLED YOU.

NO, BUT I... I MADE A MISTAKE...

LOOK AT THEM... THOUSANDS DEEP.

ARCANICS MUST ALWAYS FIGHT AGAINST THE ODDS. THAT HAS BEEN OUR FATE FOR LONGER THAN MEMORY.

IF WE CANNOT PROTECT THIS ONE CITY, WE CANNOT PROTECT THE COURTS AGAINST THE HUMANS.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE, SISTERS AND BROTHERS!

THE DAWN COURT HAS RISEN, AND THE WARLORD HAS COME TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE YOU WITH HER SWORD AND BLOOD!

THIS COMING BATTLE IS A MEASURE OF YOUR RESOLVE!

YOU *WILL* BE AFRAID! YOU *WILL* SHIT, YOU *WILL* SHAKE, YOU *WILL* LOSE YOUR WITS!

BUT YOU WILL FIND THAT LOVE IS STRONGER THAN FEAR! LOVE FOR YOURSELVES AND YOUR FAMILIES! LOVE FOR THE GODDESS!

THAT LOVE WILL GIVE YOU COURAGE!

THE CUMAEA HAVE NOT OPENED THE GATE.

AND YET THE CITY IS BURNING, AND THE DEMONS ARE NO DOUBT DISORGANIZED AND TERRIFIED.

"ALL I NEEDED WAS CHAOS.

"WE CAN HANDLE THE REST OURSELVES."

THIS THING ONLY HAS ONE SHOT IN IT. MAKE SURE YOU'RE AIMED AT THE FUCKING --

CHOOM!

WRAKOOM!

FOR THE FEDERATION! FOR HUMANITY!

KILL THE DEMONS! KILL THEM ALL!

TO BE CONTINUED...

NEXT ISSUE

#monstress

MONSTRESS™ ISSUE 28

WRITTEN BY MARJORIE LIU
ILLUSTRATED BY SANA TAKEDA
LETTERING & DESIGN BY RUS WOOTON
EDITED BY JENNIFER M SMITH
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: CERI RILEY

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